



September 16, 2016

Hon. Howard Zucker
Commissioner
Department of Health
Corning Tower
Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12237

**Re: BLOOD TESTING AND MEDICAL MONITORING FOR ALL OF THE RESIDENTS
OF THE CITY OF NEWBURGH IN RESPONSE TO THE PFOS DRINKING WATER
CONTAMINATION CRISIS**

Dear Commissioner Zucker:

We write to commend the Department of Health for its announcement at the recent Joint Public Hearings of the New York State Legislature on Water Quality and Contamination in New York that the agency is working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to develop a biomonitoring program for the City of Newburgh. Newburgh residents have been exposed to perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) in their drinking water for years, likely decades. The duration of exposure to the contamination or the health impacts that victims are enduring is unknown for the 29,000 residents that have been exposed. PFOS is a toxic chemical linked to several negative health conditions, including cancer; effects on the liver and immune system; and developmental, reproductive, and neurological effects.¹

Biomonitoring is an important step in understanding the health implications of the water contamination crisis in Newburgh. Any biomonitoring program must include making free blood testing available to all Newburgh citizens. The residents of Hoosick Falls and Petersburg were exposed to a similar toxic chemical, perfluorooctanoic acid

¹ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Drinking Water Health Advisory for Perfluorooctane Sulfonate (PFOS)" May 2016

(PFOA), and the Department has since made blood testing available in those communities. *The residents of Newburgh deserve no less.*

Blood testing is only one element of a comprehensive health response. The C-8 Medical Monitoring Program could be used as a framework for addressing the long-term health consequences of PFOS and PFOA contamination. This program was peer reviewed and independently developed as settlement to PFOA contamination. Under such a framework, a panel of independent experts would develop guidelines for a medical monitoring program in Newburgh. The medical monitoring program would then be open to all interested residents. Convening a panel of experts on water contamination and developing guidelines will not only benefit the City of Newburgh, but also communities across the State facing similar crises, including those in Suffolk County, Long Island.

Riverkeeper welcomes a discussion of how the Department will implement a comprehensive health response, like the one described above, in Newburgh. We recognize that the Department faces challenges working in Newburgh, an Environmental Justice Community, including barriers to communication, a high percentage of renters, and the low prevalence of land lines. Those challenges, however, can and must be overcome. Riverkeeper stands ready to assist in efforts to make biomonitoring successful in Newburgh.

We look forward to learning more details about the Department's planned action plan to provide blood testing to all Newburgh residents at the public meeting on Monday, September 19, 2016 at Mount Saint Mary College.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Parker", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John Parker
Director of Legal Programs

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